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THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA.

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THE territory comprised in the Isthmus of Panama formed a part of the Spanish Colonies in South America up to the 28th day of November, 1821. On that day, the inhabitants proclaimed their independence, and, by a spontaneous act of their own, they were incorporated in the then powerful Republic of Colombia, embracing, as it did, in its vast dominions the whole extent of territory that the Crown of Spain had designated under the appellatives of Viceroyalty of New Granada, Dominion or Captaincy-General of Venezuela and Presidency of Quito.

The Isthmians, on proclaiming their independence of the Government of Spain, sought to improve their condition and to insure their future well-being; and, in becoming a part and portion of Colombia, they held in view the prospect of obtaining, without the sacrifice of their legitimate aspirations, the protection of a nation which, in the course of a long and cruel war for its independence, had given evidence that it possessed brilliant and heroic attributes.

There prevailed then in that immense country, which was bounded on the south by Brazil and Peru, and on the east by Guayana, a system of centralized government, unfit for satisfying the aspirations or for ministering to the various needs and requirements of provinces so far apart; and, consequently, from the very birth of the Republic, there were deep-thinking men and eminent politicians who ranged themselves on the side of a federal régime.

The Great Republic of Colombia was dissolved in the year 1831; and from it there arose the three Republics, called Venezuela, Ecuador, and New Granada. The system of centralized government remained, nevertheless, unaltered in the Constitution which

was adopted by the last-mentioned nation in the year 1832, and the various sections continued to bear the burden of that system of forced uniformity, which, through inevitable reaction, carried within itself the hidden yet imminent peril of premature dissolution.

That was the origin of the civil war that broke out, in the year 1840, in the greater number of the provinces of New Granada. The rebellious provinces denounced the Constitution of 1832, and proclaimed the federation.

The provinces of Panama and Veragua—those, namely, into which the Isthmus was at that time divided—proclaimed their separation from New Granada, and formed an independent and sovereign state, and by an act called the Fundamental Law of the State, passed on the 18th of March, 1841, by the Convention assembled for the purpose, ratified the separation, giving to the nation thus created the name of the State of the Isthmus, and making it a point of law that it was the irrevocable will of the Isthmians, never again to be incorporated in the Republic of New Granada under the centralized régime.

The partisans of the federation were overcome, and centralism was re-established by force throughout the country; but the conception was not extinguished; and, fourteen years later, the Congress of New Granada enacted a law whereby the State of Panama was created as an autonomous entity, with the right to govern itself, provide for its necessities, and promote its progress. This act was followed by other similar ones, and in 1858 federation was an accomplished fact throughout the country.

The National Government strove to undermine the federal organization, and by its acts provoked a revolution which obtained a definitive triumph, and firmly established the federal system for the space of twenty-three years. Another civil war in 1885 was the occasion of the re-establishment of the absolute central and oppressive régime that still prevails throughout the Republic of Colombia.

The foregoing historical sketch goes to prove that the Isthmians have never considered the all-absorbing Central Government as favorable to their development and aggrandizement, and that they have, on the contrary, on various solemn occasions, declared their preference for a federal system, properly understood and put into practice, which might have allowed of their founding their pros-

perity on solid bases. The narrow-mindedness, however, of the public men of Colombia made everything subservient to the convenience of the requirements of political intrigues, never thinking for a moment of the probable results of their doings.

The central régime has always been to the Isthmians as a halter around their necks. The public functionaries, always appointed, directly or indirectly, by the Central Government of Bogota, were chosen, not for their qualifications for public service, but for their subservience to those in power. Such a misguided and corrupting policy could not fail to bring about, in all matters of public or general interest, the most flagrant misrule or the most criminal inaction.

The Central Government, as a party to the contracts for the building of the Panama Railway, now in operation, and of the Canal, now in process of construction, has received from those Companies, as compensation for their franchises, large amounts of money, which have been spent without even an attempt to discover whether the people most immediately interested in the arrangements for these enterprises were in need of help for works of public utility.

The consequences of such conduct may be observed in the actual backwardness of the Isthmus. With a territory large enough to accommodate nine millions of inhabitants, it has a population of barely three hundred thousand. Endowed with a fertile soil, suitable for all manner of agricultural enterprises, it only offers to view desultory and casual patches cultivated in the style of the aborigines at the beginning of the Spanish Conquest four centuries ago. With a mining region of exceptional richness, only one mine of importance is worked. With a seaboard of thirteen hundred miles on two of the largest oceans in the world—on one of which, the Pacific, are to be found harbors and natural docks, unexcelled on the continent—it may be affirmed that its maritime commerce is still in its incipient stage. There are no roads between its towns; there is not a bridge to cross even one of its 475 rivers.

Possessed of such a variety of natural treasures, the Isthmian people have, nevertheless, been plunged in misery; and, if statistical data were collected, it would become evident that the public wealth only reaches a low figure.

Under such circumstances, it was natural that the Isthmians

should have seen in the building of the Canal by the Panama route, a prospect of redemption for their industrial development and their material welfare; but the politicians at the centre of Colombia, for sundry reasons, thought proper to reject definitively the Herran-Hay treaty, and the hopes of the Isthmians were made abortive. The Isthmians saw once more that their interests were not taken into account, that their aspirations were not thought worthy of the attention of the nation in which they had of their own free will incorporated themselves; and, with an unanimous and irresistible impulse, they have broken the bond in which they beheld the cause of their actual decadence and their past misfortunes.

The foregoing remarks explain the motives actuating the Isthmian people in effecting the secession which has had for its result the founding of the Republic of Panama.

The Provisional Government of the Republic has been confided to three of the most notable citizens of the country, designated by the people in the most suitable manner, considering the rapidity of the movement and the gravity of the circumstances under which it was brought about. This Government is therefore democratic from its origin; and, pending the organization of the nation by a convention to be chosen by the suffrages of the people, the Government has assumed, provisionally and transitorily, all political powers.

In view of the magnitude of the labors devolving upon it, the Governmental Board has appointed six Ministers, who are now in the regular exercise of their functions. These are the following: the Ministers of State, of Foreign Affairs, of Justice, of Finance, of War and Marine, and of Public Instruction, and the portfolios pertaining to these Ministries have been given to persons who are capable of organizing and imparting stability to the new order established, and in a position to devote their labors to the welfare of the nation.

The Republic of Panama is, therefore, definitely established. Its entry into the family of sovereign, free and independent nations is an accomplished fact, and one of vast historical significance.

The internal policy of the new republic may be outlined as follows: to establish on a solid basis the public peace, for the attainment of which end the peaceful character of the people of the

Isthmus is a powerful factor; in the next place, to give an impulse to all branches of industry adapted to its soil, by the construction of public roads, the foundation of institutes for technical instruction, and by prudent protective measures; and by encouraging immigration, which is necessary to people our unoccupied territories and to exploit the unbounded natural wealth they contain.

The external policy of the Republic it is more difficult to determine; but no one can ignore the fact that in it the United States will have preponderating influence. The United States is the natural ally of the Republic of Panama by the force of events; and that alliance must, by the building of the Canal, become perpetual and indestructible. It is the interest of the United States to guarantee the sovereignty of the Republic in whose territory that nation is about to execute the most important work of the age; and Panama is in absolute need of its guarantee that the new nation will be safeguarded against aggression by any foreign Power. These interests harmonize one with the other; and the outcome must needs be beneficial to both, as promoting their mutual development.

As regards the obligations contracted by Colombia respecting the territory of the Isthmus and its interoceanic highways, the Republic of Panama will comply with them in perfect good faith, as it will also render effective the corresponding rights which belong to it as the successor of Colombia. All apprehension in regard to any conflict, on the ground of such rights and obligations, must be suppressed.

The Republic of Panama enters upon its life of independence under better auspices than have attended the birth of any other country on the globe; for it possesses inexhaustible elements of prosperity and wealth, it is favored with the friendship of the mighty nation that all the peoples of the earth honor and esteem, and it confides in the good sense of its citizens to insure that they shall dwell together in peace and concord, applying themselves diligently to those labors which make for the general welfare and exalt a nation.

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